



# Vedanta Society of Toronto

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## Newsletter March 2011

### Words to Inspire

That person is really dead though alive whose activity in this world does not tend towards dharma and thereby to renunciation and to the hallowed feet of the Divine (Hari).

- Meditation and Spiritual Life, page 438 -

### WORK AND WORSHIP

At first the aspirant may feel some difference between work and worship, though he carries on both in a spirit of surrender. Then he finds that he is able to carry on both his inner worship even in the midst of all his duties. Finally, all his work becomes a worship. At first we must make our activities as selfless as possible by offering the fruits of our work to the Divine. Later on we learn to work as instruments in His hands. Our whole life then becomes one of undivided consecration.

Work and worship must go hand in hand. Both effect the purification of our mind and help in the unfoldment of higher consciousness. They are to be looked upon as a twofold spiritual discipline, inseparable from each other.

No man or woman should neglect his or her duties in the name of meditation. If we work remembering the Lord all the while, we may not need so much of private meditation. What is most important is that the aspirant should always be in touch with the Divine in some form or other. One of the best means of achieving this is to repeat the mantra mentally even while engaged in routine work. Let the wheel of japa continuously turn within us, as Swami Brahmanandaji has advised us. Always take the help of the sound symbol. Fill up your idle moments with the name of the Lord.

Whenever any opportunity for service arises, we should take it up, and ungrudgingly; otherwise the soul shrinks. Do not seek more work, but render service if there is any occasion. We grow through giving, not through receiving. The receiver must be a giver, the giver of something. Never allow yourselves to become beggarly. Be detached but be fully sympathetic. Render help wherever you can, but without attachment, realizing that you are not the agent.

Sometimes we think that if we try to help others spiritually that would be posing as a guru. That is not true if there is no feeling of vanity or superiority in us. It is service, and we should never allow ourselves to shrink from such service when the opportunity or need for rendering it arises.

In order to convert work into worship, first of all, one should try to culture the spiritual mood with japa and meditation. When a person takes up work, he cannot think of God all the time; so let Him remember Him at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the work, thinking that he is doing the work as a form of service to Him in order to please Him. As one succeeds in taking this first step, one can remember the Lord often even in the midst of work.

The mind has got two currents, the upper one and the lower one. Usually the lower one is filled with useless thoughts. This undercurrent of the mind can be trained to think of the Lord, as one performs the work allotted to one and remembering at the same time

that one is working for His sake. This prevents the work from becoming mechanical, and also prevents the mind from being occupied with worldly thoughts.

Sometimes due to force of circumstances one has to do an excess of work, but if one's mind is properly trained, one can still find it possible to think of God even in the midst of intense activity. For this, regular preliminary discipline is necessary.

Now, how to make the mind feel convinced that the Lord is the only doer? Through work and worship you must first realize the presence of the Lord, the Soul of your soul, and then you can easily feel His will and take His power that is working through your body and mind and through everything in this universe.

This takes us to the ideal of dedication. The word means offering one's soul, mind and body to the supreme Spirit, praying to be an instrument in His hands for serving His cause, and trying to promote the welfare of all and along with that striving for the salvation of one's own self. The central idea should be to love and serve God in man, and thus realize the highest goal of human existence. The service may be physical, intellectual, koral or spiritual according to the needs of those who come in close touch with us.

As I have already said, along with work, one must also think of the Lord and offer all activities to Him. They alone become mechanical who forget the Lord and the goal of attaining Him, and work like machines. The trouble is not so much with the quantity of work as with inability to do it in a spirit of dedication to God. There cannot be any dedication unless the goal of Self-realization is kept constantly in view and the little ego is sacrificed and merged in the divine Consciousness. The person who says that in dedication one has to sacrifice everything and obey others whether right or wrong, has not understood the spirit of dedication, or even if he has, is not able to express the ideal properly. As one succeeds in practising real dedication the ego is not so much killed as transformed. The individual consciousness is united with the divine Consciousness and the individual will becomes one with the divine Will; one even feels that one's body is a part of the cosmic Body; such a person can never become mechanical. On the contrary, he leads a cosmic-centric life instead of an egocentric one.

Whatever be the nature of work you may be doing, think that you are doing everything as a form of service to the Lord who dwells in you, in everybody.

## Importance of an Ideal Personality

(Based on a talk at the VST by Prof. Narendra N. Bakhshi, Professor Emeritus, University of Saskatchewan, Canada)

In our day-to-day life, it is important for us, and especially for children and young people, to have an ideal personality — or a superior type of personality — to serve as a role model whose behavior and actions in life set an example for us.

Such a personality provides tremendous inspiration towards our advancement in life. In the case of children, for example, it starts from a very tender age. Initially, the role models are the parents. Children learn from them what is right, what is wrong and overall behavior. Parents are the first teachers and therefore have tremendous responsibility. That is why the Hindu scriptures tell us -

*Matri devo bhava*-Treat your mother as God

*Pitri devo bhava*-Treat your father as God

*Acharya devo bhava*-Treat your teacher as God

*Atithi devo bhava*-Treat your (uninvited) guest as God

Thus, it is important that the elders, the leaders of the society and others in position of authority set an example in their behavior. Leading, by setting an example, is the best way to guide the young as well as others. That is the nature of the human society. Actions always speak louder than words.

For example, we all know that Mahatma Gandhi was a practitioner of truthfulness, universal love, and nonviolence. He served as a superior personality or a role model for a vast number of people both in India and abroad and for both young and old. Dr. Martin Luther King in the U.S.A and Nelson Mandela in South Africa are some of the examples who were inspired by Gandhiji, and they in turn have inspired many others. His actions in life and the life he lived provided a tremendous inspiration for others to follow. Such personalities provide a bright guiding light for the masses in general and are of great benefit to the society at large.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, such a person has been called a *shrestha* person, a superior person — Bhagavan Krishna tells us in Third Chapter, verse 21:

*Yad yad acarti sresthah tat tat eva itaro janah  
sa yat pramanam kurute lokas tat anuvartate.*

Whatever the superior person does, that is followed also by others; what standard he (she) demonstrates by action, people follow that.

The question now arises: What does one mean by a *shrestha* or superior personality? Does it mean a person who has achieved such a status of greatness in the arts, sciences, music, drama, education, sports, politics, and other professions or something else?

The answer is both yes and no. For some, the answer may be “yes.” Outstanding achievements in any field are praiseworthy and for some such outstanding individuals may serve as a *shrestha* personality. However, in Hinduism, the emphasis on *shrestha* personality is different. Perhaps this was the question which was in the *adi kavi* sage Valmiki’s mind (the author of the first Ramayana and a contemporary of Sri Ramachandra) when he asked sage Narada a similar type of question before starting the Ramayana.

Valmiki asks Narada -

At this time in the world, who is virtuous (*gunavan*), powerful and strong (*viriyavan*), knower of dharma (*dharmagya*), shows gratefulness (*kritagya*), speaks the truth, (*satyavak*), and of firm resolution/great will power (*dridhvrtah*) (sarga 1,2). Who is of a virtuous and disciplined character, wishes for the welfare of all beings, highly knowledgeable and is wise, everything is possible for him, and he is the most handsome person in the world (sarga 1,3).

Who has full control over his mind (established in *Atman*) has conquered anger, has a shining/lustrous face, who is not jealous and does not speak ill of others, and who, when angry (say in battle) even the devas/gods become scared/afraid of him (sarga 1,4). O Maharishi (i.e. Narada) I am eager and curious to hear from you, as I know, you are capable of knowing such a person (sarga 1,5).

Now Narada replies-

Such a person has been born in the Ikshvaku clan, who is known by the name Rama. He has control over his mind, very strong and powerful, has a lustrous face, he is firm in his resolutions, and with complete control over his senses (complete self-control). (sarga 1,8)

And Narada goes on for few more verses describing Rama's qualities.

The personal qualities which sage Valmiki has talked about in these verses represent the qualities expected in a *shrestha* or supreme person or an ideal person. These qualities essentially indicate firmness in resolutions (*sthir-nischaya*), an active life of selfless action (*karmanyata*) and possession of high moral and ethical character. Such a person, also, works constantly toward the welfare of the masses. In addition, it shows another interesting characteristic, a remarkable blend of two opposite characteristics, strength/power but blended with humility, all in the service of mankind, no misuse of strength or power. Shri Ramachandra is considered to be the best exemplar of that. It should be remembered here that Shri Rama was an incarnation (of God), an *Avatara*.

Here, in Hinduism the purpose of the goal of life is to realize one's Divine nature. Thus, a role model is needed who is Perfection Incarnate and hence, a very special *Avatara* who came to show how dharma is practiced in day-to-day living. That is why Sri Rama has been called:

*Ramo vigrahavan dharmam*

(Rama is an embodiment of dharma); and

*Maryada purushottama*

(always staying within the bounds of dharma).

In one of the concluding verses of Vishnu Sahasranama (verse 8) these ideas are summarized beautifully:

*Sarva agmanam acarah prathamam*

*parikalpate*

*acara prabhavo dharmo dharmasya prabhur acyutah.*

All scriptures consider *acarah* (right conduct) as the foremost requisite. Dharma is based on right conduct and of dharma, *acyuta* (God) is the Master [here *acyuta* (means un-decaying) refers to Sri Rama, the *Avatara*.]

Some other examples of *shrestha* persons are: Krishna, Buddha, Hanuman, Guru Gobind Singh, and other Gurus, Adi Shankaracharya, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Gandhiji, Swami Chinmayananda, and many, many others with similar achievements and accomplishments.

Essentially, there is one common thread which is common to all of these personalities. Not only each one of them was highly evolved spiritually — some

are *avataras* — but all worked tirelessly for the welfare and upliftment of the masses as well.

Thus, a *shrestha* personality provides us with a powerful driving force for individual upliftment and also inspires us to rise to the same dizzying heights as they had achieved. Their lives and teachings have the power to transform our personalities. And, if an *Avatara* (incarnation of God) is taken as an example (or role model) of a *shrestha* personality, then the goal becomes nothing short of man rising the heights to become God himself, that is, the realization of the great *maha vakya*, *aham brahma asmi*, I am *Brahman*. That is one of the reasons that God comes down to earth — as it were — so that man can rise up to the level of Godhood.

Thus the question arises, how does one become a *shrestha* person?

As said before, Shri Rama is considered the best exemplar of *shrestha* personality as He followed dharma implicitly, so much so that sage Valmiki called him an embodiment of dharma.

Thus, the key in a nutshell to become a *shrestha* person is to live the life of dharma. Living a dharmic life not only allows one to live a fulfilled, harmonious, and happy life (scriptures tell us: *sukhasya moolam dharmam*, i.e., dharmic life is the foundation of a happy life) but also, its practice makes one a *shrestha* person, or a superior role model as well.

If the practice is continued, it ultimately allows one to have the experience of Godhood, Self-realization, or *moksha*.

Maharishi Vyasa (organizer of the Vedas into four Vedas, author of the Mahabharata and various Puranas, etc.) has declared at the end of the Mahabharata, in no uncertain terms, that if one follows dharma, one not only achieves *Moksha*, or Self-realization, without any doubt; but one also achieves success in *artha* and *kama* (fulfillment of economic and other desires).

The question then arises: What is dharma?

Dharma has been described as the practice of these ten ethical values given in the following verse:

*Dhrti kshama damo asteyam shaucha indriyanigraha*

*dhi vidya satyam akrodhah dashkam dharmam laksanam.*

Firmness of resolutions, compassion and forgiveness, control of mind, non-stealing, purity of body and mind, control of the senses, pure *buddhi* (pure intellect incorporating the power of discrimination and non-attachment, that is, *viveka* and *vairagya*), education (includes knowledge of the objective world and knowledge of the *Atman*, i.e. spiritual Knowledge) truthfulness, and absence of anger. These are the ten characteristics of dharma.

This is a tall order, but in my opinion, the easiest method is to practice the yoga of *buddhi* as described in the *Gita* (II/39). Yoga of *buddhi* (or *buddhi yoga*) essentially is the development of pure intellect (*sattvic buddhi*) through sincere and devoted spiritual practice.

Bhagavan Himself tells us how this yoga is accomplished. He says in the *Gita*, verses 10 and 11, Chapter X:

*Tesam satatayuktanam bhajatam priti-purvakam  
dadami buddhi yogam tam yena mam upayanti te*

To the ever steadfast, worshiping Me with love, I give the *buddhi yoga* by which they come to Me. (X:10)

Furthermore:

*Tesam evanukampartham aham ajnanajam tamah  
nasyami atmabhavastho jnana dipena bhasvata.*

Out of mere compassion for them, I, dwelling within their hearts, destroy the darkness born of ignorance, by the luminous lamp of Knowledge. (X:11)

Here the key phrase is *tesam satatayuktanam bhajatam priti-purvakam* — to the ever-steadfast worshiping Me with love. It means continuous remembrance of God's name with love. *Sarvada sarvatra sarvakalesu Hari chintanam* (Always, everywhere and at all times remember Hari). Meera Bai, a famous Krishna devotee of Rajasthan sings in a similar vein: *Mere to giridhar Gopal dusra na koi*. For me, there is only *giridhara gopala* Krishna and None Else. Jesus says the same thing: Thou shalt love thy God, with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

And when one gets established in such a state something entirely wonderful happens. The Lord's compassion and grace for the devotee

overrides human effort. Then, the Lord Himself, out of compassion, destroys the darkness of ignorance and enlightens the devotee. Of course, the devotee already had become a noble person, a *shrestha* person as he/she started traveling on the path of *buddhi yoga*.

The culmination of the process takes place when the Lord's compassion makes it possible for the devotee to become a *Jnani* — a knower of *Brahman*. The journey is now complete. The devotee now has become an ideal person, and thus becomes a powerful and ideal role model.

In summary then:

The role of a positive role model is very important, as it provides us with inspiration as well as a driving force to better ourselves.

The *Bhagavad Gita* has taken this concept much higher and calls it a *shrestha* personality, an ideal personality, a superior personality. Shri Rama stands as the best exemplar of such an ideal personality as he lived his life completely according to dharma. That is why He has been called an embodiment of dharma (*ramo vighavan dharma*) and one living always within the bounds of dharma (*maryada Purushottama*). And the key to dharmic life is through the practice of the yoga of *buddhi* in one's life.

And how can one practice the yoga of *buddhi*? Simply by constant remembrance of the name of God with love. CAN ANYTHING BE SIMPLER THAN THAT?

Just imagine, if we try to live a life of dharma (righteousness) how much it will benefit the individual and the society.

The following well-known verse gives us some idea:

If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character

If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home

If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation

And when there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.

## SUMMARY OF PAST EVENTS

**Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary** was celebrated on **Sunday January 30th, 2011 at 11:00 am**. The

programme included bhajans, meditation, puja, homa, and flower offering followed by prasad distribution. More than 200 devotees attended.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Sri Ramnavami will be held on Tuesday 12 April 2011 at 6.00 pm**. The

programme consists of bhajans, puja, flower offering followed by prasad distribution.

## REGULAR PROGRAMMES

**SCRIPTURE CLASS: Friday Scripture Classes** begin at **7:30 pm**, following the regular evening prayer at 6:00 pm. The class, held at the centre, is open to all interested persons.

**VIGIL: On Saturday, March 12, 2011**, a vigil consisting of japa and meditation will be observed, from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm. To participate, please call the centre at 416-240-7262.

**RAM NAM: Sunday March 13, 2011 at 5:00 pm.**

### INTERVIEWS/INSTRUCTION:

Swami Kripamayananda will be happy to give interviews to those interested in knowing more about Vedanta and meditation. Individual interviews are also given for spiritual instruction. Appointments for interviews should be made in advance with the Swami at 416-240-7262.

**DAILY MEDITATION:** Meditation is observed at the Centre every morning from 6:00 am to 7:00 am. Devotional singing and

meditation is held in the evenings from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm.

**DAILY BREAD FOOD BANK:** Many less fortunate families are dependent on the food bank for their daily nutrition. Please help us by contributing non-perishable food items that we may pass along to the Daily Bread Food Bank.

**SOUP KITCHEN:** The Soup is cooked at the Vedanta Society and offered **10 days in March** serving 450 meals at **Syme Woolner Neighbourhood & Family Centre, 2468 Eglinton Ave W, Unit 3, Toronto, ON, M6M 5E2**. Please contact the Centre, if you are interested in participating. Donations for the Soup Kitchen will be highly appreciated.

**BOOK STORE:** The Book Store is open after Sunday Services and special programmes, and arrangements can be made by phone for weekday and Saturday visits. We carry selected titles from the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, as well as other Vedantic materials.

Due to increasing costs and environmental concerns, please note that henceforth, the Newsletter will be mailed only to those members/devotees who specifically request it. If you would like to continue to receive the newsletter by mail please indicate so by mail/fax/email or in the Membership/Renewal form. Those Members, who have already opted for the Newsletter to be sent by post in the 2011 Membership form, need not write again. Please note that the Newsletter is always available at the centre and can also be downloaded from the website.

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*The tax receipts for donations in 2010 have been mailed. If you have not yet received the same please contact the Society immediately.*

# Vedanta Society of Toronto

Minister and Teacher - Swami Kripamayanda, Ramakrishna Order of India

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### March 2011

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		<u>1</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u> <b>6:30pm</b> SHIVA RATRI	<u>4</u> <b>7:30pm</b> Scripture class: <i>Vivekachudamani</i>	<u>5</u> Vigil: 6 am to 6 pm
<u>6</u> 11am: SRI RAMAKRISHNA TITHI PUJA CELEBRATION	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u> <b>7:30pm</b> Scripture class: <i>'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'</i>	<u>12</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen
<u>13</u> 11am Lecture: "My world and Spiritual life"	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>18</u> <b>7:30pm</b> Scripture class: Scripture class: <i>Vivekachudamani</i>	<u>19</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen
<u>20</u> 11am Lecture: "Give up"  5:00PM Ram Nam	<u>21</u>	<u>22</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>23</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>25</u> <b>7:30pm</b> Scripture class: <i>'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'</i>	<u>26</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen
<u>27</u> 11am Lecture: "Happy Journey"  <b>VVM 1:30 pm</b>	<u>28</u>	<u>29</u> 9:30am Soup Kitchen	<u>30</u>	<u>31</u>		

Talk not about impurity, but say that we are pure. We have hypnotized ourselves into this thought that we are little, that we are born, and that we are going to die, and into a constant state of fear.

Teach yourselves, teach everyone his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.

Religion is realization; not talk, not doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes.

-Swami Vivekananda-